

Message Text

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ACTION SCSE-00

INFO OCT-01 ARA-10 ISO-00 SCA-01 DHA-02 L-03 H-02 NSC-05
PA-02 PRS-01 USIE-00 SS-15 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /042 W
----- 051589 /71

O 180004Z DEC 76 ZFF-4
FM AMEMBASSY MEXICO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9265

UNCLAS MEXICO 15905

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: CASC, MX
SUBJ: PRISONER HUNGER STRIKE IN MEXICO CITY: SITREP 5

REF: MEXICO 15705 AND PREVIOUS

1. SUMMARY. ON DECEMBER 17, CONOFF LAUDERDALE VISITED SANTA MARTA PRISON ACCOMPANIED BY EMBASSY WIFE, MRS. WILLIAM GRAVES WHO IS A REGISTERED NURSE, AND SPOKE WITH APPROXIMATELY HALF OF THE AMERICAN PRISONERS THERE. CONOFF ALSO SPOKE WITH PRISON DIRECTOR AND PRISON DOCTOR AND RECEIVED ASSURANCES THAT IF ANY PRISONERS SHOULD BE HOSPITALIZED AS A RESULT OF THE HUNGER STRIKE, EMBASSY WOULD BE NOTIFIED IMMEDIATELY.

AS VISIT WAS BEING CONCLUDED SEVERAL PRISONERS ON STRIKE WERE BEING INTERVIEWED BY ASSOCIATED PRESS REPORTER AND CAMERAMAN. ONLY A FEW PRISONERS SEEMED TO BE IN BAD PHYSICAL CONDITION ALTHOUGH MOST CLAIMED TO HAVE LOST 15 - 20 POUNDS.
END SUMMARY.

2. CONOFF AND MRS. GRAVES SPOKE WITH PRISONERS REGARDING HUNGER STRIKE AND MRS. GRAVES FIELDDED QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE EFFECTS OF CONTINUING FAST. SEVERAL PRISONERS INDICATED THAT BEGINNING DECEMBER 19 THEY INTENDED TO STOP TAKING LIQUIDS INCLUDING WATER, ALTHOUGH MOST PRISONERS WHO TALKED WITH CONOFF CLAIMED THAT THEY HAVE NO INTENTION
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OF GOING OFF LIQUIDS COMPLETELY. ONE PRISONER TOLD MRS. GRAVES PRISONERS EXPECT STRIKE TO END BY DECEMBER 23 WHEN THEY ASSUME THAT MEXICAN CONGRESS WILL GO INTO RECESS. BY THAT TIME THEY ALSO EXPECT SEVERAL AMERICANS TO BE HOSPITALIZED.

3. PRISONERS EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT PRISON AUTHORITIES MIGHT FORCEABLY FEED OR DRUG THEM. CONOFF REASSURED THEM THAT EMBASSY WOULD PROTEST ANY DRUGGING OR FORCE FEEDING EXCEPT WHERE ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO SUSTAIN LIFE. CONOFF THEN SPOKE WITH PRISON DIRECTOR COL. BARQUERA AND PRISON DOCTOR SERGIO LOPEZ TIRADO, AND REQUESTED THAT EMBASSY BE INFORMED IMMEDIATELY ON 24 HOUR BASIS IF ANY PRISONER SHOULD BE HOSPITALIZED. CONOFF ALSO TRANSMITTED TO THEM PRISONERS CONCERN REGARDING FORCE FEEDING. DIRECTOR REPLIED THAT THEY DID NOT INTEND TO FORCE FEED ANY PRISONER UNLESS IT SHOULD BECOME NECESSARY TO FORCE FEED A PRISONER TO MAINTAIN LIFE, IN WHICH CASE THE PRISON HAD AN INHERENT OBLIGATION TO DO SO. DIRECTOR ALSO REITERATED CLAIM THAT IF AMERICANS HAD BEEN ON HUNGER STRIKE FOR TWO WEEKS AS THEY CLAIM, THEY WOULD ALREADY HAVE BEEN HOSPITALIZED.

PRISON DOCTOR SAID THAT THUS FAR NOT ONE AMERICAN PRISONER HAD REQUESTED TREATMENT AS RESULT OF HUNGER STRIKE.

4. AS VISIT WAS BEING TERMINATED PRISONERS WERE BEING INTERVIEWED BY AP'S MEXICO CITY REPORTER KERNAN TURNER AND AN AP CAMERMAN.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MEDICAL CARE, PENAL INSTITUTIONS, HUNGER STRIKES, PRISONERS WELFARE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 DEC 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: n/a
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 JAN 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976MEXICO15905
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760465-0557
From: MEXICO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761230/aaaaazsi.tel
Line Count: 84
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SCSE
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 MEXICO 15705
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: schwenja
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <22 JUN 2004 by chengls>; APPROVED <27 AUG 2004 by schwenja>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRISONER HUNGER STRIKE IN MEXICO CITY: SITREP 5
TAGS: CASC, SGEN, MX
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006